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Report Highlights:

This month's issue includes trendy news about fruit vending machines, cup noodles and convenient products.

Japan Food Trends (JFT) communicates Japanese Food and lifestyle trends that may help U.S. exporters generate products and marketing ideas.

General Information:

Just as a Reminder

We post this newsletter to USDA's GAIN system as well as our own business website www.us-ato.jp. This website broadcasts food trends as well as reports that ATO Japan produces throughout the year which help U.S. exporters to market products in Japan. It also provides U.S. product and company information in Japanese to the Japanese food industry. If you send us your information we'll try our best to upload your information to www.u-ato.jp. Information should be sent to sumio.aoki@fas.usda.gov.

The Japanese Food Market

“Japan's Promotion of Health via Apple-Filled Vending Machines”

CScout Japan Trends and Innovation Agency, January 24, 2011 (<http://www.japantrends.com/apple-fruit-vending-machine-for-commuting-health/>)



With the recent trend of fast food consumption and sweetened on-the-go drinks, Japan has presented health food on-the-go as well. A company called m.V.m set up a vending machine in Kasumigaseki station which only sells apples. While \$2.50 for 3 slices (or 80g) might seem expensive, the apples come from the Aomori Prefecture, which is one the most famous regions in Japan for apples. While there is only a few of these “fruit vending machines” in Japan, perhaps it will become a trend.

From the Editor:

This could be a good health promotion for people who are too busy to eat fruits, especially in a workaholic society like Japan.

“Nissin Tallies Up Their Cup Noodle Fan Votes”

CScout Japan Trends and Innovation Agency, April 27, 2011

(<http://www.japantrends.com/nissin-holds-crowdsourced-cup-noodle-election/>)



Speaking of fast food, Japan is well known for developing incredibly convenient cup noodles as on-the-go meals. One of the biggest companies in the cup noodle industry, Nissin, is celebrating its 48th anniversary by bringing back 3 of their most popular cup noodle flavors based on consumer votes. Nissin is known for having produced various innovative flavors of cup noodles over the course of its company history; sadly many of these flavors have also been discontinued. However Nissin is giving consumers a chance to once again taste their favorite, long lost flavors by holding a “crowd sourced cup noodle election.” Nissin cup noodle fans can log onto <http://senkyo.cupnoodle.jp/> and vote for their favorite flavor up to 3 times a day. The voting continues until June 30th, and the winning flavors will be announced around September next year.

From the Editor:

I’m sure this will be a difficult competition since each flavor has its own crowd! But why are they doing this? Is it because they are looking for new flavors?

The Japanese Like “Strange” Flavors

“Non-Alcoholic Umeshu Drinks for the Ladies”

CScout Japan Trends and Innovation Agency, February 23, 2011

(<http://www.japantrends.com/umeshu-plum-liqueur-for-ladies-joins-non-alcohol-party/>)



With the growing popularity of 0% alcohol drinks, such as 0% alcohol beer, more and more alcoholic drinks are becoming alcohol free. Choya has developed a 0% alcohol Umeshu (plum flavor) drink aptly named “Yowanai Umeshu,” Yowanai meaning “won’t get drunk.” Umeshu has been a popular traditional fruit-based alcoholic drink in Japan, especially with women. With the introduction of “Yowanai Umeshu”, women can now enjoy this popular traditional taste without the worry of the effects from alcohol. The drink is priced at \$1.97 for a 350mL can and hit store shelves mid-March.

From the Editor:

Women are sure enjoying the wide varieties of alcohol in beverages that are being offered, and at the same time are safe from alcoholic aftereffects.

Concept Stores

“Combini on Wheels”

CScout Japan Trends and Innovation Agency April 15, 2011

(<http://www.japantrends.com/mobile-convenience-store/>)



The subsequent effects of the earthquake that hit Japan 9 months ago left many rural areas without food and water. To answer those problems, the Lawson convenience (nicknamed combini) store chain has come up with an innovative solution to provide those troubled areas. Around mid-April, Lawson introduced their “mobile convenience store”, a van stocked with their convenience store goods and products. While it may sound simple, the vans contain essentially the whole store, including

microwaves and refrigerators for perishable foodstuffs, and the latest newspapers, magazines, accessories. With its utility, “meals-on-wheels” may see more use in the future.

From the Editor:

Lawson not only came up with their new concept store, but also generated a positive public image by helping the victims of the earthquake. These kinds of stores should also be located in urban areas for the convenience of the elderly.

Summary:

The trends in Japan continue to grow. Innovative drinks and products continue to enter the market at all angles, providing consumers with more products to choose from as alternatives to their drinking and eating needs. At the same time, Japan strives to make life more practical and convenient for everyone.